

**Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment (GCBVI)**  
**Full Council Meeting Minutes**  
May 21, 2021

**Members Present**

Bob Kresmer  
Amy Porterfield  
Ted Chittenden  
David Steinmetz  
Mike Gordon  
Bea Shapiro  
Nathan Pullen  
Donald Porterfield  
Brian Dulude  
Janet Fisher  
Annette Reichman  
Steve Tepper  
John McCann

**Members Absent**

Michael Bailey  
Allan Curry

**Staff Present**

Lindsey Powers

**Guests Present**

Kristen Mackey  
Lisa Yencarelli  
Sue Kay Kneifel  
Karin Grandon

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**Call to Order and Introductions**

Bob Kresmer, Chair, called the meeting to order at 12:32 p.m. Introductions were made, a quorum was present, and the procedural meeting rules were explained.

**Approval of February 19, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

Ted Chittenden moved to approve the minutes of the February 19, 2021 GCBVI Full Council meeting as written. John McCann seconded the motion. The meeting minutes were approved by majority voice vote.

### **GCBVI Chairperson's Report**

Bob Kresmer stated that he had invited Karin Grandon, a Federal RSA employee, to speak about an opportunity to participate in a program. Karin Grandon stated The Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) was seeking peer reviewers for the training of interpreters for individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing and individuals who are deaf-blind. Ms. Grandon stated the purpose of the program was to train interpreters to effectively interpret and transliterate using spoken, visual, and tactile modes of communication; ensure the maintenance of the interpreting skills of qualified interpreters; to provide opportunities for interpreters to raise their skill level in order to meet the highest standards approved by certifying associations and to effectively meet the communication needs of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and individuals who are deaf blind. She noted that to continue to effectively meet the communication needs of individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf blind, the department proposed a priority to provide training to working interpreters (i.e., interpreters with a baccalaureate degree in ASL-English who possess a minimum of three years of relevant experience as an interpreter) in one of four specialty areas. The priority focused on preparing interpreters to work in Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) settings.

Bob Kresmer stated he had been attending some of the Committee meetings and was pleased at the progress taking place. Bob Kresmer stated the Legislative and Public Policy Committee continued to be active and would provide a report. Mr. Kresmer stated the council would continue to follow the education of blind and visually impaired students and noted the substantial decline in students attending school during the pandemic.

### **Council Membership Discussion**

Bob Kresmer stated that Terri Hedgpeth had resigned from the GCBVI effective immediately due to health concerns, which left an open position as the Vice Chair. Bob Kresmer stated the Executive Committee was recommending that John McCann and David Steinmetz be considered for the Vice Chair position. Bob Kresmer noted that John McCann had recently indicated that he would be unable to serve in that position, although David Steinmetz would be willing to serve in that role. Ted Chittenden motioned that David Steinmetz be elected as the Vice Chair of the GCBVI. Amy

Porterfield seconded that motion. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

## **Effects of Pandemic on Students and Adults**

This item was tabled.

## **RSA Administrator's Report**

Kristen Mackey stated there was no timeline to return to offices, although Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) was optimistic that some staff would be able to provide services by appointment in offices in the summer. Ms. Mackey stated RSA still had approximately 20-40% fewer individuals in the system overall compared to the previous year. She noted that RSA was transitioning to a business service approach with very few dedicated office spaces and more of a hoteling approach in which resource rooms and client interview rooms will be available. Kristen Mackey stated that at the beginning of the pandemic, she encouraged Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) to hold off on closing cases, and now counselors were beginning to re-engage with their clients and were encouraging clients to utilize virtual services and to think about returning to work. Kristen Mackey stated RSA continued to benchmark progress with job placements and exit with employment data and noted the job placement goal was 2105 and RSA was able to place 1579 individuals. Ms. Mackey stated 12 offices have met or exceeded their goals. Kristen Mackey reported that 13 offices have met or exceeded their goals with exit with employment in which the goal was 1740 and 1098 individuals exited with employment, which was 18.3% down compared to the previous year. Ted Chittenden inquired whether staff were located in offices and able to take calls. Kristen Mackey stated that each office had a phone line that was either transferred to a cell phone, or the voicemails were picked up at least twice a day.

Kristen Mackey stated RSA distributed surveys to clients regarding how individuals would like to receive services and would be holding small focus groups in June, which would be moderated and hosted the Department of Economic Security (DES) Office of Community Engagement. Kristen Mackey stated that RSA was approved to receive the Randolph-Sheppard Act funds and was actively working with the Federal government and APOC to get that funding. Ms. Mackey stated that she anticipated level funding from the state and the Federal grant and had not heard of any impacts to the budget. Kristen Mackey stated RSA and DERS would be engaged in Strategic Planning for the next year and would continue to focus on modernizing service provision and access within VR and the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program. She noted the Business Enterprise Program (BEP)

would also continue to find ways to support operators and to generate interest in BEP training. Amy Porterfield stated that consumer groups were advocating for an additional \$500,000 in funding to be added to the OIB budget and inquired whether the Legislature was supporting that increase. Kristen Mackey inquired whether the funding would be for the OIB budget or to support individuals 54 and under. Amy Porterfield stated the funding would support Independent Living (IL) for all populations. Kristen Mackey stated RSA had a budget for 55 and older, and additional funding could be used for individuals 54 and under, although the agency would prefer to utilize stable funding. Kristen Mackey stated the agency would need to ensure that the funding for each group remained separated, and the agency would need to be clear on how the funds would be used. Amy Porterfield stated the community was in the process of campaigning for the additional funding and could include language that would indicate that the funding should remain stable.

### **SBVID Program Manager Report**

Brian Dulude stated the total number of individuals in VR at the end of March 2020 was 967 and was 836 in 2021. Brian Dulude stated in 2020, there were 31 veterans and 26 in 2021. Mr. Dulude stated the number of VR applications was 144 in 2020 and 112 in 2021. He noted the average number of days from application to eligibility in 2020 was 52.1 and was 52.3 in 2021. Brian Dulude stated the eligibility determination compliance within 60 days was 83.2% in 2020 and 82.4% in 2021. Brian Dulude stated the number of plans written in 2020 was 411 and 454 in 2021. He stated the average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 119 in 2020 and 135 in 2021. He added the highest hourly wage in 2020 was \$18.09 and \$26.61 in 2021. Brian Dulude stated 42 clients were placed in 2020 and 42 were placed in 2021. Brian Dulude stated 46 clients were placed successfully in 2020 and 26 in 2021.

Brian Dulude stated there were 47 VR clients that were deaf blind in 2020 and 42 in 2021. He stated the number of VR applications was 5 in 2020 and 5 in 2021. Brian Dulude stated the average number of days from application to eligibility in 2020 was 41.2 and 49 in 2021. He noted the eligibility compliance determination was 100% in 2020 and 80% in 2021. Brian Dulude stated the average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 117 in 2020 and 108 in 2021. Brian Dulude stated the compliance within 90 days was 83% in 2020 and 80% in 2021. He added the average hourly wage in 2020 was \$18.85 and \$17.00 in 2021. He stated 1 individual was placed in employment in 2020 and 0 individuals were placed in 2021. Brian Dulude stated the number of clients closed with employment in 2020 was 2 and 1 in 2021.

Amy Porterfield inquired whether the inability to meet with clients had affected the IPE development rates. Brian Dulude stated that several SBVID staff had retired and there was a delay in transferring those cases. Dr. Dulude noted that for a case to remain in compliance, the case would require an extension, which had not always been in place or signed by the client. Amy Porterfield inquired whether SBVID had implemented some onboarding training for new counselors to streamline the process. Brian Dulude stated he would be interested in exploring onboarding processes. He noted that new counselors were able to shadow other counselors, participated in weekly huddles, met with their supervisors frequently, and were paired with seasoned counselors to learn the processes. Amy Porterfield stated the importance of counselors receiving good blindness training. Sue Kay Kneifel stated that new counselors did have an informal onboarding program and were encouraged to participate in the Mississippi State blinding training as well. Amy Porterfield stated Mississippi State did provide a lot of information, but it did not provide a comprehensive blindness training. Bob Kresmer inquired regarding the Summer Youth Program. Brian Dulude stated that 53 students would be participating in the summer program in which 17 were new clients. David Steinmetz inquired whether Arizona had any statistics regarding how the state's metrics compared to other states nationally. Brian Dulude stated that information would be available, although he did not have that information. David Steinmetz inquired whether SBVID was on track regarding successful closures. Brian Dulude stated he anticipated numbers would be down slightly as many individuals had been reluctant to return to work due to the pandemic, although some clients were beginning to consider returning to work. Bob Kresmer inquired whether the agency was offering any incentives for staff to obtain the COVID-19 vaccination. Brian Dulude stated all staff had been educated about the vaccines and were able to obtain their vaccines during work hours if that was the only time available.

Brian Dulude stated there were 126 individuals on the ILB wait list and 64 individuals had been assigned to receive services from rehabilitation teachers and vendors. Dr. Dulude stated there were 5 rehabilitation teachers providing services as well as SAAVI Services for the Blind and the Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ACBVI). Brian Dulude stated the ILB Program Manager position would be posted in June as well as a Rehabilitation Teacher and a Purchasing Technician, who would be able to authorize services to vendors and distribute equipment. Bob Kresmer inquired whether the ILB Program Manager position had been updated. Brian Dulude stated the position description for the position had been upgraded to a 23 Grade. Bob Kresmer inquired whether the rehabilitation teachers' positions had been updated as well. Brian Dulude stated those

positions had not been updated yet, although they would.

### **BEP Program Update**

Nathan Pullen stated that most of the BEP facilities were still closed, although some offices and Federal prisons were beginning to reopen. Mr. Pullen stated that the larger dining facilities remained closed, although some of the smaller cafes were reopening. Nathan Pullen stated there had not been much movement regarding the rest stops, although he anticipated the Executive Order that allowed food truck vendors to operate at rest stops would end in the future. Nathan Pullen stated that BEP had been approved for the Federal funds, and those funds would be distributed to the vendors upon receipt. Nathan Pullen stated BEP would distribute approximately \$325,000 in Federal funding in addition to the ongoing set-aside funds that had been distributed to vendors. Nathan Pullen stated the DES café and City Hall cafes would potentially open in July and staff were ensuring that they would be able to open. Mr. Pullen stated there were no trainings scheduled, although there about 3-4 trainees interested in the BEP program. He noted there were available vending routes in Yuma, Lake Havasu, and Prescott and the Yavapai area. Bob Kresmer inquired whether new VR clients learned about the BEP program during their Orientation. Nathan Pullen stated BEP did not provide a presentation during the Orientation, although BEP staff did work with VRCs to educate counselors about the program and any job opportunities. Donald Porterfield inquired whether the BEP operators would receive all the Federal funding, or whether some of those funds would go to the set-aside. Nathan Pullen stated all funds would go directly to the vendors to cover their losses. Donald Porterfield inquired whether the vendors knew the amount that they would be receiving. Nathan Pullen stated BEP had discussed the range of funds that they would receive and who would be eligible to receive those funds. David Steinmetz inquired whether the funds would go to the operators as well as their staff. Nathan Pullen stated the funding would go to the operators, and they could decide whether or how to distribute those funds to their staff. David Steinmetz inquired whether BEP operators would be eligible for additional funding in the future. Nathan Pullen stated the Federal funds were meant to compensate a loss of profits and the BEP program did not intend to offer additional funding in the future. Bob Kresmer stated the Arizona VR and BEP program worked diligently to support the BEP operators, and it was an exemplary program nationally.

### **ASDB Report**

Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB was ending the school year, and all students would be done in June. Ms. Yencarelli stated ASDB had learned a lot the

past year on providing instruction to students in person, remotely and would be reviewing what went well and what could be improved. Lisa Yencarelli stated that students returning in the Fall, would follow the recommendations of the CDC, although ASDB anticipated that students would return to in person learning. Lisa Yencarelli stated 16 students would be graduating, in which 12 students were from regional co-operatives and 4 were from the campuses. She noted that ASDB was allowing 2 tickets per student for an in-person graduation. Lisa Yencarelli stated there was an Itinerant Instructor position open, a Teacher of the Visually Impaired for Phoenix and Yuma, and a substitute Teacher for the Visually Impaired in Tucson. Lisa Yencarelli stated the Phoenix Day School for the Deaf (PDS) had an open position for a Teacher of the Visually Impaired, due to the increase in students with combined vision and hearing loss. Ted Chittenden inquired whether ASDB would be able to share the open positions with the council. Lisa Yencarelli stated the open positions were distributed weekly, and she would share those with Lindsey Powers to be shared with the council. Bob Kresmer inquired whether ASDB had plans to offer remedial classes during the summer. Lisa Yencarelli stated she was unaware of any summer school opportunities.

## **GCBVI Committee Reports**

### ***Legislative and Public Policy Committee***

Amy Porterfield stated the COVID Vaccine Workgroup continued to meet to share updated from the COVID Task Force. Ms. Porterfield stated the Task Force had been working with the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) portal to ensure the portal was accessible. Amy Porterfield stated the portal was updated weekly, which tended to make a function inoperable, although the agency was working to ensure accessibility. Amy Porterfield stated that some organizations, such as SAAVI and ACBVI were able to hold clinics to that individuals could obtain the vaccine. Amy Porterfield stated the council held a Town Hall in partnership with the Arizona Department of Health Services, which was well attended. Amy Porterfield stated the push was for individuals to obtain vaccines in pharmacies or doctor's offices. She noted the Vaccine Finder was fully accessible as well with screen readers to search for available vaccine sites. Bob Kresmer inquired whether the state sites would continue to offer vaccines to children. Amy Porterfield stated that state sites would offer vaccines to youth ages 12-16, although there would be a push for youth to go to pharmacies for their vaccines. Bob Kresmer inquired whether ASDB had offered vaccines to students. Lisa Yencarelli stated ASDB had not offered vaccines to students, although the agency had provided information to families regarding vaccination sites. Amy Porterfield stated that it was quite easy to hold a vaccination clinic and

she would share information with Ms. Yencarelli. Bob Kresmer inquired whether would require that staff and students would be required to obtain the vaccine to return to school. Annette Reichman stated that ASDB did not have the authority to require vaccinations, as the COVID-19 vaccine was still distributed as an emergency use vaccine, although individuals could volunteer to obtain the vaccine. Bob Kresmer inquired whether the agency could require that non-vaccinated teachers or students remain virtual. Annette Reichman stated that ASDB would likely continue to require that teachers and students wear masks in the Fall in the classrooms as well as itinerant teachers. Ted Chittenden inquired whether there were any statistics of the total number of blind or visually impaired individuals that had been vaccinated. Amy Porterfield stated that she was unaware of a way to obtain that information.

Amy Porterfield stated that a bill had been dropped in the beginning of the Legislative session, which would increase the ILB budget by \$500,000. She noted that would reinstate the funding at the same level as 2008, when the budget had been cut due to the economic downturn. Amy Porterfield stated the National Federation of the Blind of Arizona (NFBA) was proposing that the funding be reinstated. Ms. Porterfield stated that council members met with Christina Corieri, Policy Advisor to the Governor, who recommended the council members push for that addition in September. Amy Porterfield stated the bill did not gain any traction; therefore, consumer groups and community members were sending emails to the Chairs of the House and Senate to remind them about the bill. Amy Porterfield stated that approximately 60 emails had been sent, and she would encourage individuals to contact the Legislature quickly. Bob Kresmer inquired whether council members should contact Amy Porterfield for more information. Amy Porterfield stated that council members could contact her for an email template. David Steinmetz inquired whether the council was able to advocate for increased funding for ILB services. Amy Porterfield stated the council could advocate for any items the Governor was in support of or remained neutral on. She noted that if the Governor opposed an item, the consumer groups or members of the community could perform those advocacy efforts.

### ***AT Committee***

Bea Shapiro stated the Assistive Technology (AT) Committee was working with the Arizona Talking Book Library to help individuals to access BARD. Bea Shapiro stated the committee suggested the library partner with Sun Sounds to offer a monthly AT hour, where individuals could learn about different topics such as accessing BARD, or how to use different devices. Bea Shapiro stated the committee was also in the process of developing



their presentation for the Vision Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Expo (VRATE) and would offer information to assist new counselors working with blind and visually impaired clients.

### **Independent Living (IL) Committee**

Ted Chittenden stated he would write the IL Committee report for the GCBVI Annual Report and would submit it to the Public Information Committee in July. Bob Kresmer stated the IL Committee was also working on the development of a workgroup that develop Best Practices and policies regarding IL services.

### ***Public Information Committee***

David Steinmetz stated Janet Fisher started the conversation on diversity and inclusion within the job postings for state employees. David Steinmetz noted that state employees were required to provide a copy of their driver's license for background checks, even though not all jobs required driving, and did not allow for an inclusive workforce. David Steinmetz stated the committee had reviewed the committee's activities outlined in the council Strategic Plan. Mr. Steinmetz stated that Lindsey Powers continued to post to the council Facebook page and Dean Colston posted information on the council Linked In page. David Steinmetz stated the Public Information Committee would be developing the GCBVI Annual Report, and he was requesting all Committee Chair reports by July so the council could review the report in September. He noted the committee was also accepting client success stories to be included in the report.

### **Ex-Oficio Member and Blindness Community Organization Updates**

#### ***Arizona Talking Book Library***

Janet Fisher stated that Karen Keninger, National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS), had announced that she would be retiring in March, although she had extended her retirement until May in the hopes of finding a replacement. Janet Fisher stated the library continued to provide services to patrons and was slowly bringing staff back to office, although not all staff would be in the office at the same time. Ms. Fisher stated the NLS held a virtual conference and discussed current and future projects and the Marrakesh Treaty, in which approximately 336 materials had been added. Janet Fisher stated there had been some updates to BARD and noted that if individuals were experiencing problems accessing BARD, to contact the library. Janet Fisher stated the library received good responses regarding the multi-book cartridge, which limited the number of items being mailed,

and allowed several users to access the same book, or for several books to be placed on one cartridge. Janet Fisher stated the NLS had several pilot programs, which included the book reader project, where individuals were given a Samsung phone to test voice commands. She noted that individuals' book wishes could be added to the phone and played. Janet Fisher stated the library was on the list to start the Marrakesh Treaty pilot program and how to work with a foreign language collection. Janet Fisher stated the third pilot program was the Braille e-reader pilot project, in which there were several models of the Braille e-reader. Janet Fisher stated the library had not received direct access to the pilot project but had identified a small group of individuals that had agreed to test the Humanware Braille e-reader. Bob Kresmer inquired whether individuals would be able to access the Talking Book Library's book through Alexa. Janet Fisher stated there had been conversations about that opportunity, although it would not likely take place until 2022. Ted Chittenden stated he would be participating in the Braille e-reader pilot project and he would be able to provide an update at the next meeting. Janet Fisher thanked Ted Chittenden for his participation and noted that devices would be distributed slowly.

### ***Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ACBVI)***

Steve Tepper stated ACBVI was offering a second class on teaching individuals to use the Amazon Echo. Steve Tepper stated ACBVI continued to expand the CVHL program and had recently hired more staff members. Mr. Tepper stated the ACBVI hoped to start the social recreation program in August.

### ***SAAVI Services for the Blind***

Amy Porterfield stated SAAVI was in the process of moving into offering in-person services, while still offering virtual services. Amy Porterfield stated that individuals that received the COVID-19 vaccine were eligible for in-person services. Amy Porterfield stated SAAVI purchased Zoom Room to accommodate virtual and in-person classes at the same time. Ms. Porterfield stated SAAVI would hold a Summer Youth Program in June, with 10 individuals to ensure that everyone remained safe. She noted that SAAVI would hold 2 children's camps in July in person and would offer activities for the children. Amy Porterfield stated the NFB Bell Program would be virtual and would allow individuals to connect. Amy Porterfield stated SAAVI received continuing grants for the children and youth program and would focus any learning loss that occurred due to COVID. Bob Kresmer inquired whether SAAVI would have sufficient staff to accommodate in-person teaching as the staff returned to the office. Amy Porterfield stated SAAVI

would be hiring AT instructors, an Orientation and Mobility instructor, a Receptionist, a driver, and a custodian.

### ***National Federation of the Blind of Arizona***

Donald Porterfield stated the NFB National Convention would be held July 6-10 virtually and individuals should register by May 31. Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA State Conference would be held September 2-5 virtually and registration for the event would open two weeks prior to the event. Donald Porterfield stated that Zoom links would be created for the various meetings and would be shared. Donald Porterfield stated the NFBA continued to advocate for the additional funding for ILB services and encouraged community members to assist in that effort. Donald Porterfield stated that Legislative members had agreed to meet with NFBA members to craft the appropriate language and to ensure bipartisan support. Mr. Porterfield stated the NFBA held a quarterly meeting and discussed how the organization would begin meeting in person. Donald Porterfield stated the deadline for scholarships was May 31, and the application could be found on the NFB website. Ted Chittenden inquired whether Donald Porterfield could share information regarding registration for the upcoming conference. Donald Porterfield stated he would share that information with the council.

### ***Arizona Council of the Blind***

Ted Chittenden stated the American Council of the Blind (ACB) National Conference would be held July 16-23 virtually and individuals interested in attending were required to create an account through ACB. Mr. Chittenden stated the John McCann was reinstating the council's advocacy efforts as well.

### **Agenda Items and Date for Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the GCBVI Full Council will be on August 20, 2021 from 12:30 pm to 3:00 pm.

### **Announcements**

There were no announcements.

### **Call to the Public**

A call to the public was made with no response's forthcoming.

### **Adjournment of Meeting**

Amy Porterfield moved to adjourn the meeting. Ted Chittenden seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:03.

As of March 31, 2021, the statistics are:

The total number of individuals in the VR program was 836  
The total number of Veterans in VR Program was 26  
The total number of individuals in the OOS was 0  
The total number of individuals in Priority Two was 0  
The total number of individuals in Priority Three was 0  
The number of VR applications was 112  
The average number of days from application to eligibility was 52.3  
The median number of days application to eligibility was 34  
The eligibility determination compliance within 60 days was 82.4%  
The number of new plans written was 454  
The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 135.1  
The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 88.5  
The IPE implementation compliance within 90 days was 69.5%  
The highest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$100.00  
The lowest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$11.54  
The average hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$26.61  
The number of clients placed was 42  
The number of clients closed successfully was 26

As of March 31, 2021, the Deaf Blind Population statistics:

The total number of individuals in the VR program was 42  
The total number of Veterans in VR program was 1  
The total number of individuals in the OOS was 0  
The total number of individuals in Priority Two was 0  
The total number of individuals in Priority Three was 0  
The number of VR applications was 5  
The average number of days from application to eligibility was 49  
The median number of days from application to eligibility was 55  
The eligibility determination compliance with 60 days was 80%  
The number of new plans written was 19  
The average number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 108.8  
The median number of days from eligibility to IPE implementation was 90  
The IPE Implementation Compliance within 90 days was 80%  
The highest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$17.00  
The lowest hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$17.00  
The average hourly wage of successful employment outcomes was \$17.00  
The number of clients placed was 0  
The number of clients closed successfully was 1